

October 31, 2008

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Disability Advisory Committee

The Disability Advisory Committee met on Thursday, October 30, 2008 at the Cowlitz County Administration Building.

Attendees were:

Kristina Swanson, Cowlitz County Auditor
Audrey Jolley, previously from Disability Resources
Maurine Coon, LCOD/LCCB
Heather Ferguson, Disability Outreach Advocate
Sharon Weinhold, Voter Outreach Coordinator

The attendees asked about the General Election turnout. We discussed turnout statistics to date, the high interest the election is receiving, and election turnout projections for Cowlitz County. We talked about the returns as compared to previous Presidential election results.

Members mentioned the committee first met in July 2006, over two years ago. The consensus was the committee has done a lot since its inception to improve voter accessibility. Most notable contributions discussed were the accessibility improvements to the County Administration Building and Elections Department, relationships made with the disability community and service providers, and the continual efforts to improve use and accessibility of the AutoMARK.

Heather gave the members a rundown on some of her efforts as the Disability Outreach Advocate. She built a comprehensive contact list of activity directors and other contacts in retirement homes, senior homes, and nursing homes in the Longview/Kelso area. She has been sending a mailer that provides voter information to these contact persons on a weekly basis. We created a sample ballot to demonstrate the AutoMARK. We offered to and demonstrated the AutoMARK at many locations throughout Cowlitz County. Heather took the AutoMARK to various locations so voters could mark their ballot. We discussed how we might improve AutoMARK interest and use. Maurine suggested it might be useful to set up the AutoMARK at high traffic locations like Wal-Mart or Fred Meyer to get more exposure. Audrey reflected that some people with disabilities do not want to admit they need help. Also, some people may be a bit intimidated by the "computer" look of the AutoMARK.

Audrey said she used the audio voters pamphlet for the Primary and General Election. She said it had excellent tone, and she liked the way each page was introduced. It allows the user to choose to listen to that page or move on to the next page.

The 2009 accessibility grant cycle was announced by the Secretary of State's Office. There will be two opportunities to apply for grants in 2009, one ending on January 16 and the other ending on May 29. The members discussed potential ideas for grants. Audrey thought it might be useful to add a microphone on the headset of the AutoMARK. This would allow for better demonstrations of the AutoMARK and make it easier to assist voters. The Disability Advisory Committee will play a key role in the upcoming grant cycles and they stated they look forward to it.

Maurine and Audrey attended a recent conference in Vancouver sponsored by the American Council of the Blind. They thought the conference was valuable and shared their conference experiences. The American Council of the Blind has an annual conference, usually for 3 days. Vendors participate. Maurine mentioned that vendors for the Hart System were at the conference and demonstrated their equipment. Audrey remarked that she had tested the Hart System in the past and found it to be less user friendly than the AutoMARK.

While they were in the County Administration Building, Maurine and Audrey both took the opportunity to vote their General Election ballots on the AutoMARK.

Sharon Weinhold
Cowlitz County Elections